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Special feature

Microchips, mandatory moves and money. There's much more at stake for campaigners for compulsory chipping than you may be aware of, as **Caroline Davis** discovers.

Points were made in the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons' (RCVS) Public Affairs Committee meeting, in February 2010, that the RCVS should not be seen to advocate compulsory chipping – '...that should be left to the British Veterinary Association and breed societies.'

As this issue of **Dogs Monthly** goes on sale, National Microchipping Month will be in full swing, with incentives for people who have not yet had their dog (or other pets) implanted with an RFID (radio frequency identification device) chip to have them done at a reduced cost, or even for free via participating veterinary surgeries and other organisations.

One canine rescue and rehoming charity, Dogs Trust, even has a roving 'chip van' that tours the country, implanting dogs and cats, and offers advice about the benefits of microchipping.

However, before you take advantage of cut-price

chipping offers, take a moment to weigh up whether it's the right thing to do for you and your pet after considering all the pros and cons of the procedure – and what the far-reaching future implications might be.

FLAWED CONCEPT

Promoters of microchipping (manufacturers, distributors and implanters) extol the benefits of chipping to the general public and pet owners, but they usually do not inform you of the potential risks connected with this invasive procedure – as reported in last month's issue ('Implanting doubt'; see page 10 to order a back issue).

One of the given pro-arguments is to remove 'dangerous' and 'status' dogs

from society; another is to solve Britain's stray problem thus, theoretically, preventing the destruction of thousands of unwanted dogs every year.

Both are certainly strong and emotive arguments: one appeals to people's sense of justice and feeling of security, while the other tugs on heartstrings.

However, there are flaws in both of these arguments. Comments Jamie Foster, one of the UK's leading legal experts in animal welfare, at national law firm Clarke Willmott:

"Microchipping can be successful on a voluntary basis as it seems to help in reuniting lost dogs with their owners. However, it is useless for other identification purposes, such as for 'weapon' dogs, since it will only affect the lawful. The whole concept of mandatory chipping is flawed and, if it comes into effect, will only create a raft of legislation.

"It is also hard to see who owners would take issue with in the event of chips causing ill health to their pet, and they

would probably end up having to take out a civil action against chip manufacturers."

To date, no chip manufacturer or other big player in the chip business has come forward and offered to investigate, and/or to pay for the research to be done to prove or disprove microchips caused adverse reactions in the four cases reported in last month's issue; although in two cases the manufacturers offered small payments as a gesture of goodwill.

HARD TO PROVE

Actually proving conclusively that chips have caused cancer or other ill health is a lengthy process, costs money and puts the dog through further testing procedures – so it is not something many pet owners are able to self-fund or find they can follow through.

In addition, complaining to a chip company may take a good deal of time in finding the right person to direct your complaint or query to, and few individuals have the time and money, or indeed inner strength, to take on multi-million-pound companies in civil law suits.

Says Jamie Foster: "The proposal to microchip dogs is, in reality, a tax on dogs rather than a proportionate response to attacks by dogs. This is a very similar idea to the ID card for people that has fallen out of favour. It would appear that the current thinking recommends surveillance as the answer to all problems in society.

"In my view microchipping is a method of expending resources rather than a method of solving the problems of badly trained dogs."

RIGHT REASONS?

Those who 'sell' microchipping do so for a reason, and if that reason is solely for canine welfare, and not for personal gain, then it is a laudable cause and one to be supported; although whether it should be made mandatory is debatable.

Becoming conversant with all the facts that can be ascertained regarding chipping may help make up your own mind as to whether it is safe and for the greater good of canines (and other pets), or

Case study

Chip brings Munchie home

A puppy stolen from Dogs Trust Evesham last October was found 171 miles away, wandering the streets of Dartford in Kent, thanks to his microchip.

Munchie, an eight-month-old lurcher puppy, was taken with his sister Pickles when the rehoming centre was broken into by thieves last year. Both pups had been microchipped by the charity and reported as stolen, so when Munchie was scanned by the Dartford Council dog warden he was immediately identified.

Chris Slight, Dogs Trust Evesham centre manager, explains: "At Dogs Trust we microchip all our dogs and this is a great example of the

technology in action. If Munchie had not been microchipped with our contact details and flagged as stolen we might never have seen him again."

Sadly, Munchie's sister is still missing but Dogs Trust is hopeful that one day he will be scanned by a vet or a dog warden and returned to them.

Meanwhile Munchie (pictured above), now 16 months old and renamed Otto, has found a lovely new home – his new owners live in a castle! Truly a 'wags to riches' story.



"Even if the number of reported reactions is underestimated by a factor of 10, the proportion is minuscule."

study of chipped canines 'to see if you have a biological effect'; a third said that reactions from implants affecting up to 10 dogs in 100,000 would not be a cause for concern, but 20-30 in 100,000 would raise red flags.

What better way to conduct such a large-scale study than on a population of millions of pet dogs (and other animals) – and get the public to pay for it to boot? Making it mandatory would ensure animals were chipped and also accustom people to chipping.

What was not put in place at the time of the introduction of microchipping animals, however, was a compulsory adverse reaction reporting scheme, either in the UK or abroad, to help ensure any problems, however insignificant or seemingly unrelated, could be properly monitored and investigated.



VOLUNTARY REPORTING

Advocates of animal chipping say that the figure for adverse reactions to chips is tiny since the British Small Animal Veterinary Association's (BSAVA) introduction of adverse reaction reports in 1997, via their Microchip Advisory Group (MAG), compared to the millions of dogs implanted with microchips, so the procedure is considered safe.

The MAG scheme, however, is an informal reporting system – vets are not required by law to report adverse reactions to microchips.

As far as further research into chip safety goes, vet Chris Laurence, current chairman of the MAG and also veterinary director of Dogs Trust (the UK's largest canine charity and a leading advocate of mandatory microchipping in dogs), says: "I suggest that over 10 years' experience of microchipping and the extraordinarily low rate of harmful adverse reactions is, in effect, informal clinical research, and any further

Guidelines on correct microchipping and scanning can be found at www.bsava.com



Chip 'n' spin?

Health & welfare

research would be simply a delaying tactic.

"Many millions of microchips have been implanted in dogs and cats across the world, probably over five million in the UK. Because the microchips are inert – they only become active when scanned by a reader – the likelihood of any reaction is small. Even if the number of reported reactions is

underestimated by a factor of 10, the proportion is minuscule. There have been only 16 reports of reactions that could conceivably be classed as life-threatening.

"The number of deaths is therefore vanishingly small and, while each one is an individual tragedy, the greater good to thousands of [stray] dogs killed a year – 9,310 in 2009 – is,

Right of reply

Dogs Trust response

"Dogs Trust was extremely disappointed to read the 'Implanting doubt' article in **Dogs Monthly** (June issue) on the subject of microchipping.

"Dogs Trust is a firm supporter of compulsory microchipping and we sincerely hope that the article does not serve to scare people off doing the right and responsible thing by their dog.

"Dogs Trust spent some time providing **Dogs Monthly** with information on the positives of microchipping and the public response to compulsory microchipping, as well as data showing that incidents of adverse reactions are extremely rare. We were therefore surprised that the article included none of these aspects and concentrated solely on scare stories.

"Any instance where a dog dies or is disabled is of course absolutely devastating but the evidence available does not point to microchipping being the cause.

"As a respected publication, Dogs Trust feels that **Dogs Monthly** has a duty to provide its readers with balanced articles offering facts on a subject, rather than speculation, to enable people to make their own informed decisions.

"We hope that the follow-up article will in some way redress the balance."

Clarissa Baldwin, chief executive, Dogs Trust

Editor's comment

It is our duty, as we are well aware and as a respected publication, to present both sides to a story. The second side is presented in this second article; it was stated that it was going to be at the end of the first article.

Adverse reactions are rarely reported and, according to my findings so far, are not that rare if you go looking for them, rather than rely on them being voluntarily reported.

Available evidence has not proven without doubt that chips are not the cause of suspected adverse reactions. There is room for doubt as to them being as safe as they are billed to be.

The American Veterinary Medical Association provides more information on the pros and cons of chipping than the MAG site does, or indeed any other British pro-chipping site.

Owners should be aware of possible negative consequences, as well as the positive, so they can make an informed decision as to whether having their pet chipped would be in their best interest or not.

I am not comfortable with being branded an irresponsible owner who is not doing the 'right thing': the right thing in whose eyes may I ask?

There was no 'speculation' in the first article – it simply reported the experiences of four dogs and their owners as regards microchipping.

Did you know?

Dogs can be tender in the chip area for a while after insertion, so avoid pressure here until you are certain any soreness has subsided, otherwise your pet may be defensive of people going near or stroking or putting a collar on him for fear of

them inadvertently hurting him. One normally well-behaved dog bit a child while being petted following microchip insertion: he was put down. The owners wondered, afterwards, whether discomfort had caused the incident.

in my view, far the lesser of the evils."

"The question then is whether the adverse welfare consequences on thousands of dogs can be overridden by the ethical objections of a very small minority of owners, many of whom have been affected by scare stories about microchips."

Regarding the report in **Dogs Monthly** last issue of two suspected microchip adverse reactions in America (Scotty and Seamus), Mr Laurence adds: "Neither of these reports shows a cause between the microchip and the tumour. What is odd about them is that the microchip site is a very unusual site for either type of tumour and it may be that both were secondaries to a primary elsewhere.

"It seems unlikely to me that the microchip caused the tumour – if microchips did do that you would be expecting dozens or hundreds of reports, not just two or three."

In actual fact, Seamus's tumour is being investigated and the outcome as to its cause is still awaited; in Scotty's case, the tumour was tested with the pathologist concluding that it could well be associated with the microchip.

To investigate a tumour, and ascertain its cause, first of all the microchip would have to be suspected (and it isn't always obvious to either the owner or the vet) and owners would then have to agree to and pay for expensive tests.

This could explain why the incidence of adverse reaction reporting is small.

SELF-MONITORING GROUP

According to the BSAVA, any adverse reaction reports received by them are passed directly to Mr Laurence, who is also the vice-chairman of the Pet Advisory Committee (PAC), which provides information and advice to Parliament and

national and local government.

The Microchip Advisory Group (MAG), according to the British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA), is made up of representatives from companies in the field of microchips, animal welfare groups and veterinary organisations; its members comprise microchip manufacturers, distributors, databases, major purchasers [of chips] and major implanters. Between them they developed a code of practice.

A WIDER AGENDA?

Catherine Driscoll, of Canine Health Concern (www.canine-health-concern.org.uk), says: "My problem with mandatory microchipping is the word 'mandatory'. When a procedure has the potential to cause cancer, however small the risk, then we should not be forced by law to inflict that procedure on our dogs.

"There seems to be no proper mechanism for reporting adverse reactions to microchips. In fact, it's widely known that adverse reactions to drugs are vastly under-reported. Why would it be any different with microchips? Although the BSAVA has an adverse reaction reporting system in place, pet owners and vets have to actually be aware of the potential of an adverse reaction before they're going to report it.

"Here's the root problem, by way of example: The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies sent me a flyer, advertising that anyone could attend their course on 'how to insert a microchip', which cost £195. When I telephoned and asked if they were covering the cancer potential, they said they'd never heard of it!

"If a veterinary college offering microchipping courses doesn't even know the potential adverse consequences of chips, then what hope is there that

anyone else will? Will a vet in practice, dealing with cancer, stop to think 'Hello, this is where his microchip was placed.'?"

"The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), unlike UK veterinary associations, believes that microchips should only be inserted by qualified veterinary surgeons.

"I can understand charities not wanting to euthanise dogs because their owners can't be found, and I can understand owners wanting to microchip in case their dogs get lost – but I am concerned that no-one seems to be advising dog owners of the possible adverse effects. It's all very well saying the risk is minimal – unless, of course, it's your family friend who turns out to be one of the unlucky ones. Is the UK so full of criminal dog owners that this mandatory microchipping can be justified, or is there a wider agenda?"

"Although the 'official' adverse effect reports have been relatively few so far, when or if they prove to be more numerous or more of a problem than initially thought, how many years will it take to overturn the mandatory label?"

Right of reply

Petlog's response

"At Petlog we were deeply upset when we read the 'Implanting doubt' article in the June [2010] issue of **Dogs Monthly**.

"We felt that the information was one-sided, not factually based and misleading as it mentioned Petlog at the very beginning of the report but failed to mention that Petlog is a responsible and professionally run database working with 10 microchip suppliers, all of which adhere to an industry code of practice overseen by the Microchip Advisory Group (MAG).

"In addition Petlog handles over 10,000 lost and found calls each month, totalling some 120,000 calls a year.

"As far as we are aware the stories of cancer in the report are not proven to be connected to microchips and all evidence appears to be circumstantial.

"There have been several studies undertaken investigating a suggested link of cancer to microchipping; these have involved rodents. While there did seem to be a one per cent occurrence of cancer near or around where the chip was placed, in at least one of the studies the mice were specifically

It has taken me 16 years of my life trying to halt unnecessary annual vaccination, and I cannot see an end in sight – even though it is known scientifically that annual vaccination is neither necessary nor safe. It's hard to stop a juggernaut, especially a multi-million-pound international juggernaut. The Noble Leon website (www.noble-leon.com) has a very good article quantifying the multi-billion-pound industry that mandatory microchipping can deliver to its investors.

"We need proper training in place and proper knowledge of potential adverse effects, and we need to have a way to stop it if mandatory microchipping proves to be causing unacceptable harm.

"Furthermore, if a dog gets cancer growing around his microchip, we need proper compensation from those who force us by law to implant the chips in our dogs – although it's hard to know how they can undo the pain, misery, death and grief once it's been caused.

"Dog owners really do need to be aware of the potential consequences of mandatory microchipping. We ought to say NO to it unless and until

an adequate adverse event reporting system, and a proper compensation scheme, is in place. We need to be told what we are doing to our pets before we are forced by law to do it. If we sleep through this one, it will take years to overturn it – and countless family friends may die before it's stopped."

WHAT THE PUBLIC WANTS?

The Kennel Club-owned and managed Petlog database says that they are logging 40,000 new registrations a month – that's 480,000 dogs a year. That represents a lot of earning

potential (£800,000 a month if chipping is charged at £20) for the database, implanters and chip manufacturers and distributors. That's also potentially a lot of lost or stray dogs safely returned to their owners and saved from destruction if the system works efficiently.

But is mandatory chipping something the British dog-owning public really wants? It is, according to Dogs Trust (www.dogstrust.org.uk) – who are campaigning for, and have been lobbying government for over 12 months, for the mandatory microchipping of dogs – who say that 88 per

bred to produce tumours.

"The article mentions just four cases relating a microchip to cancer, but if this is compared to the millions of dogs which have been chipped with no adverse reaction the argument becomes very much less meaningful.

"At Petlog and the Kennel Club we promote responsible ownership and we encourage pets to be microchipped, but we also encourage people to use the Petlog service so that owners can be confident in the service with which they are being provided."

Editor's comment

The only reference to Petlog in the article mentioned is that National Microchipping Month (June 2010) is organised by this UK Kennel Club-owned and managed company. The feature neither endorsed nor criticised microchipping or Petlog, it simply reported the problems associated with microchips experienced by some people.

"Further information regarding cancer studies (including dogs, not just rodents) and comments by leading cancer specialists can be found in my article in the September 2009 issue (see page 10 to order a back issue).

According to the RCVS, there is an issue over implanting in very small animals, and fatal injuries have been reported following implantation of microchips by non-veterinary surgeons.

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cent of UK dog owners back the compulsory microchipping of canines.

This statement is based on a survey carried out on behalf of Dogs Trust in 2008, by market research company GfK NOP Ltd, which sampled the attitudes of 1,328 people to compulsory microchipping.

But were those surveyed aware of the possible cons, as well as the supposed pros, of the microchipping procedure? Drawbacks relating to microchipping, as highlighted in last month's issue of **Dogs Monthly** (as mentioned previously), include pain, death, cancer, chip migration and non-location leading to the death of implanted pets.

Says a Dogs Trust spokesperson: "The questions [in the survey] were asked in a neutral way, highlighting neither pros nor cons, merely explaining what a microchip is and its purpose."

Dogs Trust "won't be talking about any perceived cons of microchipping in its literature, since the charity doesn't believe that there is significant evidence to suggest they are a risk to animals, but is always happy to answer people's questions on the subject."

As regards the removal of freedom of choice for dog owners, Dogs Trust veterinary director Chris Laurence says: "Dogs Trust has always stated that a tattoo can be used as an alternative to a microchip. However no data supports there being a significant risk from microchips."

According to Dogs

Trust's Annual Report 2010, the charity is pledging to invest £240,000 in promoting and providing microchips this year; it provides free or low-cost microchips to over 100 local authorities and their stray dog pounds across their targeted campaign areas.

A HONEYPOT

So what is the real reason for introducing mandatory chipping into the UK? Many of those who have been campaigning against compulsory chipping say it boils down to one thing – money, and lots of it.

Barbara Haywood, from New Jersey in America, is a campaigner for canine rights (www.dogpolitics.com). She says: "In my opinion, bills to introduce mandatory chipping are not about saving dogs' lives, or reuniting dogs with their owners; they are first and foremost about collecting data information about the dogs' owners.

"The potential for financial gain by marketing that information is enormous. For example, there are 79 million dogs in America and at \$25 to chip every one of those dogs, plus dogs born each year thereafter, that's a huge amount of money going to chip manufacturers, distributors, implanters and the charities endorsing and implementing the procedure. This potentially creates a cartel that shares and stores collated data, creating an exclusive pet owners' database that's priceless in terms of marketing potential, for example if information was

Did you know?

The 2010 canine population in the UK is 8 million according to the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association. If each dog was chipped at an average cost of £20, that's £160 million revenue for starters, not counting the annual puppy crop thereafter and additional fees for amending database details as necessary due to address changes and so forth.

Lists of dog owners' (consumers') details are worth around £100 per 1,000 names to businesses targeting pet owners. If shared between other list holders for other information, such as how much you spend per year on pet food, for example via shop loyalty cards, those lists become extremely valuable for marketing purposes.

Dogs Trust states that it makes no profit out of chipping and that it does not even recoup its costs from offering low-cost and free chipping. Dogs Trust also says that it receives no funding or donations from companies associated with the microchip industry, nor that there is any beneficial link between it and Petlog (such as sharing collated data).

Petlog states that, as a not-for-profit organisation, any profit made is ploughed back into the Kennel Club Charitable Trust where over £3 million has been invested in dog scientific research, dog health and dog welfare.

In addition, Petlog says it does not market or share its data, therefore gains no commercial benefit from it; it does, however, have contractual obligations to the chip suppliers which are entitled to a copy of Petlog's data should they require it.

sold to insurance companies.

"The blanket and mandatory microchipping of dogs goes beyond canine health and welfare concerns – the bigger issue is data and privacy. For example, all Rottweiler owners could be targeted for something, all German Shepherd Dog owners for another, and all owners of unneutered dogs for something else still – the possibilities are endless, and scary – with the pet-owning public blissfully unaware that their privacy is being sliced and diced and being sold to the highest bidder."

BIGGER ISSUE

Subliminal conditioning, by stating that all responsible owners should have their pets chipped is, in my view, an insidious way of

telling people this is the right thing to do and implying that you are irresponsible if you don't. However, making the procedure mandatory in the UK would take away the freedom of choice in the matter anyway.

Is the promotion of microchipping dogs (and other pets) really for the good of the animals; or is it only a form of scientific experimentation? And is this experimentation on the effects on the dog, or on the length of time people will need to become accustomed to this technology – with the universal chipping of humans for collation of valuable data and surveillance being the intended future result?

LOST DOG SCENARIO

If you are unfortunate enough for your dog to go missing, your first port of call should be to report it to the

local dog warden (during office hours via your local council) and to see if he's been handed in or picked up.

Wardens' remit is to scan the dog for a chip, and check for a collar ID tag, where he is found then ring the owner to come and pick him up from that location; if no owner can be located immediately, the warden takes the dog (for obvious safety reasons) to the local pound.

At the pound, the owner will have to pay (in one example, as different councils charge varying fees) a release (seizure) fee of £55 if the dog is chipped and collar-tagged (£80 if not chipped or tagged) plus a kennelling fee of £10 a day.

However, this doesn't always work in practice: wardens, for all sorts of reasons, don't always scan the dog where he's found, and take him back to the pound straight away; scanners are not always reliable in the field; chips cannot always be found due to migration and/or user error/inefficiency.

In one instance, it took a pound three days before the dog was scanned for a chip, resulting in the owner having to pay three days' kennelling fees plus the seizure fee. In another case, the shelter scanner failed to pick up the chip and a dog sat in the kennels for seven days before being reunited with his owner.

Chip and tag details should carry the owner's mobile and landline numbers to help ensure you can be contacted at all times – it's no good if the warden is calling your home number during office hours when you are at work.

Wardens do sterling service generally, but owners also have a duty of care to ensure their dogs are kept under control and safe at all times, and wear an ID tag when outside the confines of their owner's property.

Bear in mind, should your dog be stolen, a microchip does NOT represent proof of ownership.

PRINCIPLED ARGUMENT

Charles Farrier, co-founder of the www.chipmenot.org.uk website, is against compulsory

chipping for various reasons. He says: "There is a simple principled argument against chipping: it is not right to implant a foreign body into a living being. A number of people will instinctively understand this without further explanation.

"As evidence emerges that chips may cause cancer you may think that it might be possible to prosecute those that fit chips for causing unnecessary suffering to animals. However the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (view it at www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/ukpga_20060045_en_1.htm) has a provision in Section 4 (3b) – that means that should chipping become compulsory then the suffering will be state-sanctioned and so those that fit chips cannot be prosecuted.

"Chips are not a silver bullet. Just because a dog has a chip does not mean that it will work. Chips can fail, can move from their original location or might be missed by someone with a chip reader. Is this failure rate not comparable to the failure of mandatory dog collars and tags?

"If collars and tags really do suffer from an excessive failure rate, as is mooted by pro-chippers, then why not encourage owners to consider having their dogs tattooed on the inside of their hind legs rather than implanting a chip? This is a much simpler solution – but of course there is a lot less money to be made then by chip manufacturers, chip reader companies and other related businesses.

"While supporters of dog chipping claim that the number of dogs with chip-induced tumours is small, the reality is that reliable research and reporting of adverse reactions is only just emerging.

"Vets often dismiss chips as a cause of cancer, partly, in my opinion, as they themselves chip dogs and make money from it. This has meant that not enough data has been collected by vets and not enough biopsies have been conducted on pets to fully explore the issue.

"Anecdotal evidence suggests that the problem is much worse than chip manufacturers would have the public believe.

Case history

Conflicting adverse reaction report

We were interested to read the June 2010 chipping feature in **Dogs Monthly** and wondered if the 'struggling kitten' case mentioned was, in fact, referring to our kitten, who died in similar circumstances.

Our kitten's name was Neo. In October 2003 we adopted two eight-week-old kittens from the RSPCA Hyson Green branch in Nottingham; one of the conditions of adoption was neutering and chipping. As the kittens were too young at the time we had to take them back to the RSPCA to be chipped [at 12 weeks]. We returned to the Hyson Green branch in January 2004 where the procedure took place.

Although there was a treatment room with work surfaces and benches, the person who carried out the chipping said it was a simple procedure and proceeded to do the chipping on top of a cat enclosure that was about 1.2m high; Neo's head would have been approximately 1.35-1.4m off the ground. It was my opinion that the implanter was over-reaching to chip Neo and was not in control of him. As she inserted the chipping needle he moved back.

Neo then started shaking. First the implanter used the chip detector to see if the chip had been inserted, then she put Neo on the floor where he went into a fit. Then he fell over with blood coming from the back of his neck.

The branch manager was called in and then took Neo off to a vet saying that Neo was in shock. We headed off to the vet's knowing that Neo was already dead.

"An independent adverse animal reaction registry has been set up by ChipMeNot USA and you can find out more about this at www.chipmenot.org.uk

"It is not possible to create responsible owners via legislation. Anyone that

The vet asked if he could do a post mortem to establish the cause of death and confirmed that the chip had been inserted into Neo's brain stem.

The circumstances are different to the adverse reaction report in that Neo was not 'struggling' at the time of implant – he moved back as the chip was inserted.

I wrote letters to the RSPCA but never received a satisfactory answer to why it had happened; it was called a tragic accident, we were sent a key ring and a pen with an apology letter. At no time did the RSPCA contact myself, my wife or our daughter and her friend who were present at the time to obtain the facts of what happened.

At the time I contacted many people involved with chipping and they all said they had never heard anything like it before.

Chris Griffin, Nottingham

Editor's note: It seems likely that Neo and the 'struggling kitten' comprise the same case, since that was the only incident of that type reported to MAG at the time.

The RSPCA says: "Although this incident happened over six years ago, the RSPCA obviously extends its sympathies to the owner for what happened. Staff are fully trained to carry out this procedure and the RSPCA successfully microchipped more than 68,000 pets in 2008. Instances like this occur extremely rarely and we would like to reassure the public of this and we continue to advise pet owners to microchip their animals."

believes this can be done does not understand what responsible ownership entails.

"In my opinion, governments increasingly want to control all elements of peoples' lives and are no longer satisfied with their role of administering the nation's infrastructure. ➤

In horses it's recommended that the implant area is shaved prior to chipping to help prevent hairs being pushed in with the needle; in dogs, this isn't deemed necessary.

Did you know?

Veterinary nurses receive incentives from Petlog via its Premium Vets scheme, which was designed to create a nationwide network of vets who can be contacted if a pet goes missing and asked to look out for it – a good idea. The quarterly scanning competition's prize draw offers prizes such as Christmas hampers, Champney's spa days and day trips.

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‘Implanters in this country, other than vets, do not belong to any overseeing body so they have no-one monitoring them nor is there anyone for dissatisfied customers to complain to or turn to for advice.’

“The media play their part in calling for the state to ‘do something’ and an increasingly infantilised public all too often fall into line. Responsibility cannot be state-sanctioned; only obedience and fear can be state-sanctioned.

“If dog chipping is compulsory then owners will no longer investigate the pros and cons of chipping or the effects on a pet’s health. In other words they will no longer act as a responsible owner should. Compulsion will actually legislate AGAINST responsible ownership. Unthinking obedience is not the same as responsible ownership.”

FUTURE CONCERNS

Nathan Allonby, co-founder of the chipmenot website, adds: “There are other concerns than

dog health, and perhaps we would like to stress these even more highly. The dog health issue is important, but there are also issues about what compulsory dog registration may mean for dog owners in the future.

“If registration is to be compulsory, then this means it is going to be enforced; that enforcement and monitoring needs to be considered part of the overall scheme. Enforcement is likely to become a contentious issue. What happens if a dog does not have a working chip? Would the dog be destroyed? We have heard stories about poor reliability of chips – perhaps up to 30 per cent not functioning correctly.

“The option of compulsory dog registration was considered in 1988, when the previous dog licences were abolished. The government of the day wanted to do something about dangerous dogs, and the issue of licences was included in the review. At that time, Labour was in favour of compulsory dog registration (it was a commitment in their 1987 election manifesto).

“The Conservative government decided that this would be too heavy-handed and unpopular, and quite irrelevant to the issue of controlling problem dogs and owners. Instead, the government opted against registration, to abolish licences (which only

about 50 per cent of owners purchased anyway) and to introduce targeted legislation and enforcement against problem dogs and owners.

“In 1988, the government decided it could not justify registration – there were no specific objectives which justified the financial overheads of registration or making charges on the public. For the government of today to revise its view suggests that there are further plans and further controls, which depend upon prior implementation of a registration scheme – they have to have something in mind to justify the cost, and to justify hassling dog owners with regulations.

“What next? There could be, for example, a new series of mandatory controls, compulsory vaccination, compulsory DNA testing and a DNA database for dogs (the idea of a DNA database has been floated both in the UK and in America).

“There have been stories of ghastly crimes involving dogs, where a human criminal has been identified by DNA testing of their dog. There is also the controversial idea of identifying banned breeds by DNA testing – a concept which has disputed reliability.

“And last, but not least, chipping humans.

“There have been recurrent attempt to introduce mandatory chipping of humans, but these have been defeated due to public reaction. Chip-implanting all dogs may make the public accustomed to the idea of routine implants, thus less resistant to chip implants for humans.”

HUMANS NEXT?

The claim that chipping humans may be next on the agenda is not as far-fetched as you may think.

In addition to PositiveID developing a chip designed to keep tabs on forgetful patients, as mentioned previously, giant pharmaceutical company Novartis has been developing a chip for humans designed to remind them when to take their pills (in this case the blood pressure drug Diovan).

In trials, a ‘compliance’ chip was implanted into the

shoulders of 20 patients, while another chip is inside the pill and sends a message to the chip in the shoulder; if the next pill is missed, the shoulder chip nags you on your mobile phone!

Novartis’s chief executive officer, Joseph Jimenez, is reported as saying “This industry is starting to explode.” Novartis failed to explain to **Dogs Monthly** what exactly he meant by that.

Novartis also failed to answer questions from **Dogs Monthly** as to how the chips had been tested, for how long, on what, if any, animals and if Novartis had any research information regarding the safety of chips from trials on animals including dogs. The company referred **Dogs Monthly** to its partner Proteus Biomedical Inc who are developing and commercialising this ‘smart’ chip. Proteus, too, failed to respond to our questions.

BREAKING RULES

Lawrance Rafferty, founder of the Northern Ireland politics and business website www.talk-big.com (where more information regarding other aspects of microchipping can be found) has his own views on why microchipping should not be made mandatory in the UK.

He says: “Those in government that advocate mandatory chipping are not adhering to the precautionary principle required by European Union (EU), which is supposed to be the backbone of all European studies. No complete scientific study has been done as regards microchipping dogs, impartial or otherwise. So that rule has been broken.

“In Northern Ireland the public consultation regarding introducing mandatory chipping was swamped by animal welfare groups. There were a couple of breeders there, but very few owners. The majority of dog owners don’t even know there is a consultation and it was not extensively advertised.

“The meetings comprised stakeholders and lobbyists. Each person was allowed to ask two questions and the animal welfare groups dominated the entire meeting, despite being from England in



‘Statutory dog licensing has been abandoned as being unenforceable and expensive to administrate, while mandatory chipping would shift the costs on to the animal’s owner, but it would still be necessary to demonstrate a public benefit,’ was a point made at a recent RCVS meeting.

many cases and having no real right to be at a local assembly meeting in Belfast designed to get local views.

“In addition, the Minister for the Department of Agriculture, and Rural Development, Michelle Gildernew wasn’t even there to see it, so that is how important she felt it was to get local opinion.

“So basically, the entire yardstick by which legislation is measured was subverted in the consultation thus far.

“Having gone to the Belfast meeting for the consultation on compulsory microchipping, the adverse reaction figures given were presented as if they were peer-reviewed science. When I questioned the figures and asked where they came from I wasn’t given an answer.

“A large proportion of those at the meeting were from animal shelters in England. I discovered that the figures had been taken as fact because they came from animal welfare groups. Some of those groups operate in close cooperation

with the large RFID manufacturers and distributors on MAG. This is not impartial advice, it is lobbying.

“What were they doing at a local government assembly meeting? What is their agenda?

“The one thing that is sure is that with millions of dogs getting chipped, some will have an adverse reaction. The owner could end up with a massive expense of having to treat a dog with cancer. What does that cost? Thousands of pounds! Will vets be treating that dog for free? No. Will insurance companies adjust policy exclusions to avoid paying out on this? Possibly. So the owner gets nailed again, the dog gets a painful cancer, and the vets and big pharmaceutical industries get richer.

“At the end of the day I really just want to have the choice to avoid implanting my dogs with something which may cause a severe adverse reaction and ultimately cancer.”

Editor’s opinion

It is my opinion that it is unfair, undemocratic and unnecessary to force dog owners to microchip their pets when chips have not been proved to be 100 per cent safe (although what medical procedure is?), nor effective if the dog is not scanned properly, the chip fails (or exits the body), or the scanner fails to recognise a chip.

As regards chips comprising permanent ID – they do not; they can, and have, been removed from dogs by unscrupulous people, and/or new chips implanted.

Where the argument that chipping will help stamp out bad breeders and enable the monitoring and erasure of unhealthy strains in pedigree dogs is concerned, it won’t. Unscrupulous breeders can, and do, forge pedigree papers, and will soon find a way to get around the chipping mandate. Bad breeders will not want to be held to account for their actions, so will find a way to avoid being traced via a chip.

‘Stealth tax’ rules

Invariably, there will be an element of the public who will not comply with mandatory chipping, because they do not want to be identified by ‘pet police’. So again, in my view, it is unlikely that anything will significantly change as regards the ‘weapon dog’ and ‘deliberate stray’ problems (where irresponsible owners abandon their pets), except that law-abiding dog owners will be helping to foot the resulting bills in dealing with them. In New Zealand, similar laws were introduced some years ago, but reports are that it hasn’t reduced vicious dog attacks since, generally, the owners of these dogs avoid licensing, chipping and insuring them.

Canine rescue homes are said to be overflowing at the moment, but this situation could become

worse if mandatory chipping comes into effect as some people may dump dogs, try to rehome them or have them destroyed rather than comply for various reasons including financial pressure, the desire to avoid being identified and, perhaps, simply because the pressure of more ‘stealth tax’ rules on the compliant takes yet more pleasure out of pet-owning.

People involved in the chipping industry stand to make a huge amount of money from chipping (for example, up to a 400 per cent profit for implanters on one chip), so maybe this is the real reason behind the push for compulsory chipping – because it’s a massive revenue generator?

Implanters in this country, other than vets, do not belong to any overseeing body so they have no-one monitoring them nor is there anyone for dissatisfied customers to complain to or turn to for advice. It’s up to the customer to pursue them for any damages or vet costs if something is proven to have gone wrong with implantation.

It’s interesting that proposals for chipping humans – starting with criminals – has been mooted both in the USA and here: how better to test chips on large animals, such as dogs, than by making it mandatory – and thereby getting the unsuspecting public to pay for the testing?

In any case, I would not want a chip implanted in me or my children – nor do I wish to have one put in my best friend, my dog. ●

● **If you wish to report a suspected or confirmed adverse reaction to a microchip, no matter how insignificant you may think it is, go to www.chipmenot.org.uk**

Vets can also report to this site, and to the MAG at www.bsava.com where adverse reaction forms can be downloaded.